THE FOURTH DAY.

25th February, 1926.

The Assembly met again at 11-30 A. M. on Thursday, the 25th February, 1926.

49. Improvement of Agriculture.

MR. P. ALEXANDER (*Member, Kunnattur taluk*) said that, in the matter of cultivation, the financial return to the cultivator should not be the sole concern; the more paramount interests of the State and its food supply should receive adequate recognition. Rice is the staple food and neither rubber nor the inflated price it might fetch could take its place. The importance of conserving paddy cultivation connot be over-estimated. Lands fit for cultivation were in places deteriorating or becoming unsuited for the purpose owing to neglect and lack of proper investigation. Local knowledge would be more helpful in reclaiming such lands than mere expert opinion. It was not the creation of appointments that was necessary for the development of agriculture, but the effective organisation of the experience and enthusiasm of local agriculturists for practical purposes. Travancore was importing every year more than Rs. 2 crores worth of paddy and rice. By the wide and judicious use of manure in Japan, the crop-bearing capacity of lands was being steadily maintained and poor soils were being brought into fertility. Many articles which could be used in Travancore as manure, such as fish, laurel *punnac*, *marotti punnac* and other oil cakes, were now being freely exported to foreign countries without payment of any considerable duty. While Travancore was exporting 1·5 million cwts. of such articles in a year, Japan imported £. 1·25 million worth of oil cakes alone in 1903 against £. 35,000 worth in 1891. Everything possible should be done towards conserving manures. Human excreta and fish should be more freely used for manurial purposes. Annually, about 2,00,000 cwts. of fish were exported from the country. "Waste nothing", should, as in Japan, be the watchword in regard to manure. There were extensive areas, for instance in the Kunnattur taluk, included within the reserve with little value for the purposes of the forest conservancy, which could with advantage be made green-leaf manure farms. Free passes should, as an alternative, be issued for the collection of green leaf manure.

Agricultural loans were not doing the maximum good in the directions intended by the Government. They were issued to men of influence and often for purposes foreign to the Rules. The loans should be issued through the agency of taluk committees. Rules regarding the assignment of *puduvals* to adjoining owners and the prohibition of registry of communal *porambokes* such as *chiras*, canals and tanks were being freely violated to the detriment of agriculture. Paddy fields should continue as paddy fields; and facilities should be afforded to ryots. The formation of taluk boards consisting of officials and non-officials for these and allied agricultural purposes forming part of the Agricultural Department would be highly beneficial.

DEWAN'S REPLY: Mr. Alexander, all that you said was extremely interesting and instructive. The Government are at one with you in desiring that the agricultural development of this country should proceed apace. As you point out, the well-being of this country depends largely on agriculture and nothing should be omitted which can preserve and foster the agricultural industry. In the matter of loans, your suggestions will be carefully considered, as also what you proposed as regards the improvement of the constitution of the department.

50. Condition of the ryots of Central Travancore.

MR. K. G. THOMAS (*Member, Mavelikara taluk*) said that, in 1100, 7 lakhs of acres of land were under paddy cultivation, 5 lakhs under cocoanut and 4 lakhs under tapioca. The output of paddy was 2·25 lakhs of tons and the quantity imported was

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2·50 lakhs of tons. The population being 40 lakhs, this gave only less than a *nali* of rice per day to one person ; or it is adequate only for the needs of less than half the population. It was therefore of the utmost importance that the output of paddy should be increased, and for this purpose, the agriculturists in Travancore needed capital most. Hence the need for the Government's strong initiative in that direction.

Then, in regard to Travancore soils, according to the Agricultural Report, they were deficient in nitrogen, phosphoric acid and slaked lime. One acre of paddy land required artificial manure to the extent of 12 lbs. of phosphoric acid, 24 lbs. of nitrogen, 40 lbs. of potash and 200 lbs. of lime. The free export of fish, oil-cakes, etc., from the country, of which Mr. Alexander, the Member for Kunnattur taluk, gave statistics, should at once be checked by as high an export duty as possible. The nightsoil collected in the towns of Trivandrum, Quilon and Alleppey was now being wasted ; its utilisation as manure through the agency of the Sanitary and Agricultural Departments would also help to increase municipal revenues.

The rate of interest *viz.*, 6 per cent. on agricultural loans was high in view of the low return from agriculture and the rates allowed to deposits in the Savings Bank and Debenture Bonds. Some portion of the money invested in 3½ per cent. Government of India promissory notes might with advantage be realised and invested in agricultural loans.

Agriculture in Travancore suffered also by the paucity of communications for the transport of manure and the marketing of the produce. This could be seen from the fact that, of the 196 subjects for representation at this session of the Assembly, all but 24 related to the construction of roads, canals, bridges, etc.

A veterinary hospital at Kayankulam was urgently required and in spite of several representations to the Government in the matter, it had not been possible hitherto to get a hospital established there.

The Kayankulam-Adur road was in a deplorable condition. The road was dangerous for cart traffic and even for pedestrians, being covered with pits two to three feet deep and full of slush during the rainy season. The Member narrated a personal experience and invited the Dewan to visit that Slough of Despond and the Hill of Difficulty near it and prayed that the Chief Engineer should issue immediate and stringent instructions in the matter.

DEWAN'S REPLY : Mr. Thomas, it has been a great pleasure to listen to such an enthusiastic agricultural reformer as you are. You touched upon several points, and I shall first of all take up the question of insufficiency of capital on which you dwelt. That is a curious feature of this country. Every man who has got a little capital thinks it is incumbent upon him to sink it in land and the whole of it in land. If a man has Rs. 3,000, he goes and buys a couple of acres or so with the whole of it. So, he is left with little or no money at all to develop it. If from the produce of the land he gets Rs. 300, he goes and buys another half an acre of land. A great many of the people of this country think that the measure of a man's wealth and prosperity and his enterprise is the measure of the acres he owns. He does not provide himself with sufficient capital to work and develop the land. Therefore, it is not correct to infer that there is no capital in the country ; the real fact is that the whole of a man's capital is sunk in the land itself. That is a feature of the case which you and your friends will do well to ponder over.

2. You referred also to the question of loans for agriculture and you say that the rate of interest, *viz.*, 6 per cent. charged by the Government is too high. That is a very difficult question. As you know, the problem of the rate of interest is always dependent on the money market over which, I am afraid, a small country like Travancore has no control.

3. Then you referred to communications. I agree with you that communications are necessary everywhere. Not merely do communications facilitate the transport of manure and enable people to carry their produce for sale, but they encourage people to develop the land still further. You may rest assured that the Government have the question of the improvement of communications in the interior of the country anxiously under consideration.

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4. In regard to the veterinary hospital that you want, I am sure the Director of Agriculture will bear that in mind so that you will not have any need to point your finger at him in the next Assembly. As you know, the Chief Engineer has already taken steps to fill up what you call the Slough of Despond and to level down the neighbouring Hill of Difficulty on the Kayankulam—Adur road.

51. Cocoanut palm disease.

MR. P. M. THOMAS (*Member, Municipal Council, Haripad*) said that the Government were not aware to the full extent of the annual destruction of cocoanut palms along the sea-coast and the backwaters in the State caused by various pests. The most virulent of the diseases is the "*Mandapuzhu*". It was first noticed as early as Dewan Mr. Krishnaswami Row's time in the eastern portions of Tiruvalla. Though remedial measures were attempted ever since, the disease had now spread throughout the State. Some time the disease appeared in Kayankulam and began to spread thence. Most of the cocoanut palms in the Kartikapalli taluk were now affected. Dr. Kunjan Pillai was taking steps to combat the pest. Government spent money and got down a European expert for investigation. But none of these served any useful purpose. It was a most distressing sight to see these *kalpakavrikshams* in an advanced stage of the attack. The taluks of Kartikapalli, Karunagapalli and Shertallai were most affected, particularly as the people in those taluks could not cultivate rubber or tea, coffee or pepper. The wholesale destruction of trees impoverished the rich man and made the condition of the poor tenant miserable. If the disease were to spread like this, there would be a progressive decline in the export duties and excise revenue, and the cocoanut palm might become extinct. The entire resources of the Government should be utilised to check the spread of the disease which sapped the life-blood of the tree. The Member said that he had no intention to blame the officers of the Agricultural Department when he said that no good had been done by all their exertions in the matter. The Government need not hesitate to get down an expert from America or Germany. Neither the Kallar scheme nor the Cochin Harbour, the Trivandrum water supply or railway extension or the State-aided bank was more important than the extermination of the cocoanut palm disease. During the session of the Assembly, a conference of the Members coming from the taluks affected and the Director of Agriculture should be held to consider what steps the Government should take in the matter.

DEWAN'S REPLY: Mr. Thomas, there is nothing so sad and so distressing as to travel throughout the length and breadth of Travancore and see the terrible blight upon the cocoanut trees. We all know that the wealth and prosperity of Travancore is largely dependent upon the cocoanut palm which has for so many years given so lavishly of its best to the country. To see this great natural asset wasting away under the blight is a very serious matter. Everyone here present knows that, for several years past, the Agricultural Department has been striving and struggling to eliminate the blight from the country, so far without much success. The department has discovered means by which the blight can be checked, means by which it can be exterminated in particular cases. But the cultivator and the landowner, experience shows, have not responded with that dogged persistence which is necessary to kill such a disease. There are two ways mainly by which the blight can be eradicated. The first is by removing the cause of infection, that is by the complete destruction of the infected palms. The second is the preventive method—that is by stimulating the life-blood of the tree, so that it can resist the inroad of any infecting matter. Just in the same manner as a strong, healthy human being resists all infection and keeps disease away, so too a strong healthy tree could be made to resist infection, that is, the cultivators or the owners must lay themselves out carefully to tend the tree by manuring it and looking after it and making it more healthy and strong. These are the only two ways in which the department can assist you to resist the blight. There are other ways too, more scientific and more costly, in respect of which too the Director of Agriculture is doing his best to teach the people what to do. All we can do is to put forth our best efforts and to hope for the best.

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